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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the questions of whether or not the transmission of common civic values and commitments to society should be a major goal of U.S. schools is considered. The effects of classroom, school, and society on civic values and attitudes are addressed in terms of: (1) the curriculum and classroom instruction; (2) school structures and climates; and (3) teaching and learning. The paper concludes that: (1) civic education in schools should emphasize constitutional democracy's core values; (2) U.S. citizens tend to be disappointed in the lack of responsible citizenship exemplified by the nation's youth; (3) interested persons tend to debate how the schools, in concert with other social agencies, can affect U.S. youths' character and citizenship education; and (4) U.S. citizens agree that education for responsible citizenship can be improved through an increased focus on school and societal agents. Thirty-four footnotes and a selective bibliography of ERIC resources is included. (JHP)

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I. Introduction

"What is the American, this new man?"[1] J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, a French immigrant to North America, pointedly raised this question in the 1780s. We Americans today are still asking it and searching for answers through civic education in our schools and society.[2]

From the 1780s to the 1980s, we Americans, the inventors and sustainers of a nation of immigrants, have been concerned and sometimes confounded about our national identity and the civic commitments that it entails. According to Lawrence Cremin, our leading historian of education, "Two hundred years after they had made their Revolution, Americans were still in the process of defining what it meant to be an American and hence what they were prepared to teach themselves and their children. . . ."[3]

In this quest for national identity and civic commitments, we Americans have looked to values in our most revered public documents (e.g., the Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution, Federalist Papers, Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural Address, and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" oration). Attachment to these civic values presumably defines what it means to be a responsible citizen in a nation marked by ethnic and racial diversity. Thus, Richard Rodriguez, a prize-winning writer, says: "I am brown and of Mexican ancestors, one generation into this country. I claim Thomas Jefferson as a cultural forefather."[4]

Rodriguez's view is reflected in this recent statement of the American Jewish Committee: "Pluralism works only if all groups remain committed to the concept of a single national identity. . . . Many cultures thrive here because they share a common civic commitment to the nation and its government. It is this acceptance of a unifying civic authority that makes possible the acculturation of new immigrants into the American polity."[5]

Should transmission of common civic values and commitments to our society be a major goal of schools in the United States? Public opinion polls and survey research studies suggest that most Americans want commonly-accepted civic values and moral standards to be part of the curriculum of schools.[6] And prominent proposals for reform and improvement of American schools stress the necessity of "education for democracy" (for example,

see the report of the Education for Democracy Project).[7] Both the general public and particular educators are concerned about the relationships of schools and society to the civic values and attitudes of students, which point to the main questions and topics treated in the rest of this paper.

What are the effects of the curriculum and classroom instruction on civic values and attitudes of American youth? How do the structure and climate of the school affect the civic values and attitudes of students? How are the teaching and learning of civic values and attitudes in school related to civic education in the society outside the school? These questions are addressed in terms of three topics:[8]

- classroom-level effects on civic values and attitudes;
- school-level effects on civic values and attitudes;
- school/society effects on civic values and attitudes.

II. Classroom-level Effects

Classroom-level effects refer to direct and indirect teaching and learning in the classroom through formal courses of study. They also pertain to the degrees of classroom freedom and security that students perceive concerning expression of information and ideas on controversial topics and issues.[9]

Most American youth are exposed to formal study of civic values, attitudes, and behavior at least three times in secondary school: in a junior high or middle school American history course, in a high school American history course, and in a high school government or civics course. Many students are also taught about civic values, attitudes, and behavior in special elective courses in law-related education. The following discussion is a very brief summary of the research literature on the apparent effects of these classroom-level experiences on civic values and attitudes.[10]

There is little doubt that the standard curriculum in social studies fundamentally contributes to students' knowledge of values and behavior associated with government, law, politics, and citizenship. The most important instructional variables appear to involve students' exposure to course content. Students' achievement of knowledge is strongly related to the number of courses taken, the scope and depth of topics studied, and the amount of time spent on lessons in the classroom and in homework. Direct and systematic procedures of instruction, involving authoritative direction by the teacher, seem to enhance learning of civic knowledge.[11]

By contrast, direct teaching of knowledge about government and citizenship through standard secondary school courses does not seem to have a major impact on students' civic attitudes or values. However, analysis, appraisal, and discussion of civic issues in a supportive classroom environment seem to promote development of democratic attitudes and values. Teachers increase their potential for developing democratic values and attitudes among their students when they provide systematic instruction in critical thinking about civic issues and create conditions for classroom discussion of these issues that are conducive to free exchange of information and ideas.[12]

The formal curriculum and classroom instruction have little or no effect on the political participation of American youth and adults.[13] In particular, data from longitudinal studies indicate that exposure to social studies courses in high school is not related to the kind or quantity of political participation by adults. Rather, it seems that socioeconomic status, and the civic values, attitudes, and opportunities that accompany it, are directly associated with levels and amounts of civic activities, which range from voting in public elections to participating in political organizations.[14]

It seems that there is ample room for improvement in the contributions of the social studies curriculum and classroom instruction to students' learning of civic values, attitudes, and behavior. The quantity and quality of this learning are disappointing, as indicated by reports of the National Assessment of Educational Progress and various other surveys of American youth and adults. It seems that about half of the American student population graduates from high school with superficial knowledge of core civic values and shallow commitments to them. In particular, American youth and adults tend to lack knowledge of the Bill of Rights and its application to cases in American history. And, although public attitudes about the Bill of Rights are generally positive, support for certain liberties and rights tends to markedly decline when they are applied to cases involving unpopular minority groups or individuals.[15] Americans are also more likely to be mere spectators and casual supporters than active participants in their political system. And they tend to have misconceptions about how to participate effectively in the political arena.[16]

One explanation for weak effects of the school curriculum on certain aspects of civic learning is the poor quality of the content and pedagogy to which students are exposed. After all, students' learning in the classroom is dependent upon the substance, design, and manner of presentation of their lessons. New programs in law-related education, for example, seem to be promising means to improve classroom-level effects on students' knowledge, values, and attitudes about responsible citizenship.[17]

III. School-level Effects

Let us suppose that a vastly improved curriculum is conceptualized, validated through sound research, and implemented widely in schools. We would still need to be concerned about how the school is organized and managed, about the climate or ethos of the place, which may be as important as what is taught in classrooms through formal courses of study.

Civic learning results from the interplay of academic experiences in the classroom and practical experiences within the school. So non-classroom attributes of schools—such as style of administration, executive organization, school governance, peer interactions, extra-curricular programs, etc.—are likely to profoundly affect civic values and attitudes of students.[18] The following brief synopsis of research findings and commentaries emphasizes alternative views and issues about school-level effects on certain kinds of civic learning.[19]

It is generally accepted that student participation in extracurricular activities of the school is positively related to development of political efficacy and propensities for participation in civic life outside the school. And it seems that these student activities are much more influential than formal classroom study in development of positive values and attitudes about participation in public affairs.[20]

There may be a positive relationship between "democratic school climate" and development of democratic political attitudes and behavior among students.[21] One experienced researcher claims: "School organizational and governance climate is related to political attitudes of students. More participant and less authoritarian climates are linked to more positive [democratic] political attitudes and behavior of students."[22]

Some educators have used this "democratic school climate" research to advocate active student involvement in decisions about school rules and policies. For example, the Board of Directors of the National Council for the Social Studies declared:[23]

> It is not enough that schools preach democracy; they must practice it also and be able to instruct through modeling. What is taught from textbooks about the advantages of democracy should be exhibited within the school.

> Students should not be asked to accept the tenets of democracy on faith, but rather they should be assisted to develop commitments based on analysis and reason. Concurrently, the school experience should provide young people with an immediate example of a democratic system so that they can feel the effects of democracy.

There is, however, another way of looking at school-level effects on civic and moral learning; it is based on a growing body of research on school climates and on character education that points to authoritative leadership by administrators and teachers in behalf of democratic citizenship goals. School-level characteristics that fit this position are

- authoritative articulation and implementation by administrators and teachers of a civic/moral code that reflects rights and responsibilities of citizenship in a constitutional democracy;
- strong instructional leadership in support of well-defined intellectual, moral, and civic virtues that fit the prevailing civic/moral code;
- clear and justifiable standards of behavior that are consistent with the civic/moral code;
- establishment of an orderly environment that supports intellectual and moral development;
- disciplinary policies—carried out emphatically, consistently, and fairly—which are compatible with the prevailing civic/moral code;
- behavior of administrators and teachers that provides for students positive models of responsible citizenship and sound character;
- high expectations for both intellectual and moral development of all students.[24]

Some educators have used this "effective schools and character education" research to argue against conceiving of the school as a microdemocracy. Rather, they propose school climates in which adults authoritatively and unambiguously support core values of the community as standards for responsible behavior in the school and as preparation for democratic citizenship by students after leaving the school. Gerald Grant, an investigator of school-level effects on students, says: "The essential function of authority is to assure the united action of a multitude in the pursuit of some common good"—character development in preparation for responsible citizenship in a constitutional democracy.[25]

There is obvious agreement in the research literature about the importance of school climate in development of civic/moral values, attitudes, and behavior. There is also confusion and contradiction about the meaning of key terms—such as "democratic schooling"—and about the relationships between school-level practices and desired effects of civic education. Is it possible that there are important elements of truth in both of the rival conceptions of school climate and practice? If so, how might these elements be synthesized? Is it likely that one or both of these conceptions is seriously flawed? Given the critical importance of school-level attributes in civic education, we need renewed attention to the challenges of theory, research, and practice in this field.[26]

IV. School/Society Effects

The curriculum and the climate of a school do not wholly account for what students learn, or do not learn, about civics or anything else. Other social agencies also affect the intellectual and personal growth of youth—shaping values, attitudes, and behavior—sometimes in concert with the school and at other times in conflict with it. Schools function within a larger society in which civic education is carried out through various agencies: the family, church, mass media of communication, formal and informal groups of peers, government, etc.

What has been the relative influence of these various social agencies on the values and attitudes of American youth? A composite of eighteen major studies ranking the force of various social agents on American adolescents in 1960 and 1980 shows that parents, teachers, clergy, youth leaders, and family relatives lost influence during this twenty-year period. During the same span of years, three other social agents greatly increased their impact on the character and citizenship of our youth: the electronic media, print media, and peer groups.[27]

Consider the growing influence of television in the lives of young Americans: the average high school student spends about twenty-eight hours a week watching television, but only four or five hours doing homework. About three-quarters of our twelfth-grade students watch television every day, but less than half of them include reading of books, magazines, or newspapers in their daily routine.[28] Of course, television can be a positive or negative force in the education of youth, depending on the quality of programing and the extent to which it may reinforce or expand upon worthwhile learning experiences in schools or other social agencies.

The relationships of civic education in schools to other social agencies are critically important. For example, home-based reinforcement of school rules, of homework policies, and of educational goals is strongly associated with gains in academic achievement and decline of negative behavior. This parental reinforcement of the school is more strongly associated with positive outcomes than other factors, such as socioeconomic status.[29] It is clear that the family can function in tandem with the school as a major force in

the shaping of character and citizenship, especially among children and pre-adolescents.

What about other relationships between the school and the larger society in the civic and moral education of American youth? Important advocates of educational reform in the United States have proposed school-based programs on community service as an important, or even a required, part of civic education. Ernest Boyer, for example, proposes: "Beyond the formal academic program the high school should help all students meet their social and civic obligations. . . . [They] should complete a service requirement—a new Carnegie unit—that would involve them in volunteer work in the community. . . ."[30]

The rationale for school-based community service programs is that students will develop positive values and attitudes about civic affairs and responsible citizenship, important skills of civic participation, and inclinations toward active involvement in the civic life of their community. Do they?

The research literature suggests modest effects of school-based community service programs on the participants' sense of political efficacy, interest in civic affairs, sense of civic duty, and skills in leadership and followership. Program effects are greatest when educators provide "a regularly scheduled time for collective reflection on the experience."[31] In general, close and clear connections between the formal program of studies in school and civic action experiences in the community increase the positive effects on students' civic values, attitudes, and behavior.[32] However, theory, research, and practice about school-based community service programs are in an early stage of development and need to be improved.[33]

V. Conclusion

This brief survey of literature suggests some important tendencies of Americans in their views about schools and society in the civic education of our youth. We Americans tend to agree that civic education in schools and society should emphasize core civic values of our constitutional democracy—values associated with principles embedded in our most important public documents. We want our youth to learn and internalize these values, to express reasoned commitments to them, to behave consistently with them.

We Americans tend to be disappointed in the performance of our schools and other societal agents in educating our youth for responsible citizenship in our constitutional democracy. We tend to be dismayed by the results of national assessments of civic learning and concerned about the rather weak impact of the school on the civic values, skills, dispositions, habits, and knowledge of students.

We Americans tend to debate alternative positions about how the school in concert with other social agencies should and can affect the character and citizenship education of our youth. And we often are impatient with the ambiguity of theories and research as guides to practice.

We Americans of the 1980s, however, tend to agree that we must and can improve education for responsible citizenship and that the school, in concert with other societal agents, is the appropriate focus of our efforts. This agreement is reflected in the closing paragraph of a compelling and widely-supported report on principles of civic education in the United States.[34]

> As citizens of a democratic republic, we are part of the noblest political effort in history. Our children must learn, and we must teach them, the knowledge, values, and habits that will best protect and extend this precious inheritance. Today we ask our schools to make a greater contribution to that effort and we ask all Americans to help them do it.

In answering some questions on civic education, this statement raises other questions. What blend of knowledge, values, and habits will "best

protect and extend" our democratic heritage? How, exactly, should "our schools make a greater contribution to that effort"? And how should "all Americans [from various sectors of the society] help them do it"? What should and can be the linkages between schools and other agents of society in the civic education of American youth? These questions indicate basic challenges for civic educators in their quest to improve the effects of schooling on the civic values and behavior of youth.

Notes

1. J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters From An American Farmer* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1981; first published in 1782), 69.
2. See Sanford Levinson, *Constitutional Faith* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), 4-5. Levinson says that "there is an important conversation to be initiated about what it means to be 'an American' in the late twentieth century. . . . In particular, I assume that there are many persons who share a very strong sense of 'being' American, but are without an equally confident sense of what that means, especially in regard to what, if any, political commitments that identity entails."
3. Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Metropolitan Experience, 1876- 1980* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), 14.
4. Richard Rodriguez, "What Is an American Education?" *Education Week* (9 September 1987): 44-45; Rodriguez has also written a profound autobiography that treats acculturation and civic education in the United States, *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (Boston: David R. Godine, Publisher, 1982).
5. American Jewish Committee's Task Force on the Acculturation of Immigrants to American Life, *The Newest Americans* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1987), 3.
6. James S. Leming, "Research on Social Studies Curriculum and Instruction: Interventions and Outcomes in the Socio-Moral Domain," in *Review of Research in Social Studies Education: 1976-1983*, ed. William B. Stanley (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1985), 183.
7. Education for Democracy Project, *Education for Democracy: A Statement of Principles, Guidelines for Strengthening the Teaching of Democratic Values* (Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers, the Educational Excellence Network, Freedom House, 1987); this report has been endorsed by a large number of organizations and leaders representing all sectors of the American society, and it reflects the current trend to stress the values of constitutional democracy in civic education in schools and society. In addition, see *Civics: United States Government & Politics Objectives, 1988 Assessment* (Princeton, New Jersey: National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1987); the list of content objectives and assessment topics shows the current importance of democratic values in the proclaimed civic education mission of American schools.
8. Values are standards or criteria by which one weighs alternatives and makes judgments about the worth of something. Civic values are standards one uses to make judgments about public issues and officials (e.g., policies of government, candidates for public office, proposals for reform of public institutions, etc.). An attitude is a positive or negative orientation to something, which is based on one's values and beliefs. See James P. Shaver, *National Assessment of Values and Attitudes for Social Studies* (Paper commissioned by the Study Group on the National Assessment of Student Achievement, 1986).
9. Lee H. Ehman, "The American School in the Political Socialization Process," *Review of Educational Research* 50 (Spring 1980): 100.

10. The research literature from which this synthesis is derived is very uneven in scope and quality; furthermore, various methodological limitations suggest caution in our interpretation and use of the findings. However, as Ehman notes, "If all of these problems were used to exclude studies from consideration, there would be almost no work left to review (page 100 of the study cited above). So, the findings are presented as suggestive, not conclusive, and as stimulators of thought about lines of future research and practice, but not as prescriptions. The reviews of research by Ehman (1980) and Leming (1985)—cited above—are main sources of these findings, but a few important articles that report original research are also cited.
11. Ina V.S. Mullis, *Effects of Home and School on Learning Mathematics, Political Knowledge and Political Attitudes* (Denver: National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1979); Office of Educational Research and Improvement, *What Works: Research About Teaching And Learning* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1986), 34-35; see Ehman and Leming, cited above.
12. Edith M. Guyton, "Critical Thinking and Political Participation: Development and Assessment of a Causal Model," *Theory and Research in Social Education* XVI (Winter 1988): 23-49; Judith Torney, A. Oppenheim, and Russell Farnen, *Civic Education in Ten Countries* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1975); see Ehman, 106-110, and Leming, 161-164.
13. Jon D. Miller, *Effective Participation: A Standard for Social Science Education* (Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Social Science Education Consortium, Racine, Wisconsin, June 5-7, 1985); Ehman, 107-108.
14. Miller, 25-28; M. Kent Jennings and Richard Niemi, *The Political Character of Adolescence* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974); Lester W. Milbrath and M.L. Goel, *Political Participation: How and Why Do People Get Involved in Politics?* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1977).
15. National Assessment of Educational Progress, *Citizenship and Social Studies Achievement of Young Americans: 1981-1982 Performance and Changes Between 1976 and 1982* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, 1983); Charles N. Quigley et al., *Preliminary Report on High School Students' Knowledge and Understanding of the History and Principles of the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights* (Calabasas, California: Center for Civic Education, 1987); Diane Ravitch and Chester E. Finn, Jr., *What Do Our 17-Year-Olds Know? A Report on the First National Assessment of History and Literature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987); Stanley M. Elam, "Anti-Democratic Attitudes of High School Students in the Orwell Year," *Phi Delta Kappan* 65 (January 1984): 327-332; Hearst Report, *The American Public's Knowledge of the U.S. Constitution* (New York: The Hearst Corporation, 1987); Herbert McCloskey and Alida Brill, *Dimensions of Tolerance: What Americans Believe About Civil Liberties* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983).
16. Miller; Milbrath and Goel.
17. Charlotte Anderson, "How Fares Law-Related Education?" *Curriculum Report of the NASSP* 16 (May 1987): 8-9; Grant Johnson and Robin Hunter, *Using School-Based Programs to Improve Students' Citizenship in Colorado* (Boulder, The Colorado Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Council, 1987). There is a great need for more research to substantiate claims about the effectiveness of school-based law-related education programs, and there is a general need for research about practices to improve the content and pedagogy of civic education in schools.
18. Ehman, 100 and 110.
19. The cautions and limitations mentioned in note #10 also apply to the research literature on school-level effects.
20. Paul A. Beck and M. Kent Jennings, "Pathways to Participation," *American Political Science Review* 76: 94-108.
21. Ehman, 110-114; Leming, 156-163.
22. Ehman, 113.
23. NCSS Board of Directors, "The NCSS Position Statement on Democratization of Schools," in *Democratic Education in Schools and Classrooms*, ed. Mary A. Hepburn (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1983), x.
24. Gerald Grant, *Education, Character, and American Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1981); Michael Rutter et al., *Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools*

and Their Effects on Children (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979; Gerald Grant, *The World We Created at Hamilton High* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988; Office of Educational Research and Improvement, *What Works: Research About Teaching And Learning* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, 1986), 45-50.

25. Gerald Grant, *Education, Character, and American Schools*, 138.
26. James Leming is particularly critical of the methodology and evidence of the democratic school climate research: "[The] research on democratic classrooms and schools both reflects the paucity of evidence available as well as the eclectic interpretations of democratic education in the literature" (page 158 of *Review of Research in Social Studies Education: 1976-1983).*
27. Gilbert T. Sewall, *Necessary Lessons: Decline and Renewal in American Schools* (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 76-77; a detailed discussion of these data can be found in *Daedalus*, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Fall 1981, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
28. National Assessment of Educational Progress. *Homework: What Do National Assessments Tell Us?* and *Television: What Do National Assessments Tell Us?* (Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service, 1986); Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Youth Indicators: 1988 (U.S. Department of Education, 1988).
29. Richard Barth, "Home-based Reinforcement of School Behavior: A Review and Analysis," *Review of Educational Research* 49 (Summer 1979): 436- 458.
30. Ernest L. Boyer, *High School: A Report on Secondary Education in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 306-307; Morris Janowitz, the notable sociologist, has also strongly recommended school-based community service as a basic part of civic education, see *The Reconstruction of Patriotism: Education for Civic Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 170-191.
31. Leming, 142-148.
32. Joan L. Herman and James Burry, *Evaluation Report of the Constitutional Rights Foundation's Youth Community Service Program* (Los Angeles: Center for the Study of Evaluation, Graduate School of Education, University of California, Los Angeles, 1988.
33. Leming concludes: "Overall, the findings of research on programs involving community participation and social action can be considered tentative and only slightly encouraging." See *Review of Research in Social Studies Education: 1976-1983*, 147.
34. Education for Democracy Project, *Education for Democracy: A Statement of Principles, Guidelines for Strengthening the Teaching of Democratic Values* (Washington, D.C.: American Federation of Teachers, the Educational Excellence Network, Freedom House, 1987), 21.

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